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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003718

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SUNNIS PESSIMISTIC ON PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR CONSTITUTION

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT FORD, FOR REASON 1.4 (B) AND (D).

1. (C) SUMMARY: Deputy Prime Minister Abid Mutlak al-Jaburi predicted to Charge September 10 that without changes to the draft text, especially on the issue of Iraq's Arab identity, no Sunni political figure would publicly support the constitution. Another Sunni Arab negotiator, Shaykh Anwar al-Lahibi, told PolCouns September 9 that while the text was "80 percent good," without a change on the identity issue he doubted Sunni Arabs would support it. Separately, Iraqi Council of National Dialogue (ICND) member and Constitution Committee expert Dr. Saadoon al-Zubaidi told PolOff September 10 he was pessimistic about the results of Sunni-Kurdish meetings in Irbil over the last few days. There are no reports of any agreed changes to the Constitution as a result of these meetings. END SUMMARY

2. (C) Deputy Prime Minister and political independent Abid Mutlak al-Jaburi told Charge September 10 that without "small" changes to the text, no Sunni Arab political figure would publicly support the draft constitution. He had no news about the discussions in Irbil. The most important change, he said, would be reaffirmation of Iraq's Arab identity. He asserted that Kurdish acceptance of such language would change nothing on the ground but would reassure the Sunni Arab community. Al-Jaburi also said it would be better to tighten the conditions under which new regions could be established. Charge cautioned al-Jaburi that the window for additional changes was about closed. If al-Jaburi felt strongly about such changes, he should talk to Kurdish leader Masood Barzani immediately. Charge cautioned that the kinds of amendments to the text that al-Jaburi is seeking are not "small" changes and will be difficult if not impossible now.

3. (C) Al-Jaburi also provided a copy of a letter signed by Iraqi Islamic Party General Secretary Tariq al-Hashimi September 3 calling for Sunni suspension of participation in the government in response to the ITG's "unjust campaign against the Sunni". The letter asks senior Sunni officials to resign if the government does not respond to their demands. It was addressed to al-Jaburi, Vice President al-Yawr, Governorate Affairs Minister al-Hardan, Defense Minister al-Duleimi, Industry and Minerals Minister al-Najafi, Culture Minister al-Rawi and Women's Affairs Minister al-Shaikhly. Al-Jaburi said he would reject al-Hashimi's proposal and had extracted signed pledges from almost all the other recipients to do the same. (Al-Yawr, al-Jaburi said, had "authorized" the Deputy Prime Minister to sign for him.) However, al-Jaburi stressed that the situation is becoming increasingly difficult for Sunni figures in the ITG who want to support the draft constitution.

4. (C) Al-Jaburi characterized the position reflected in al-Hashimi's letter as an effort to remain politically competitive on the Sunni Arab street with the Moslem Ulama Council, which has taken a hardline stand on the draft constitution. PolCouns responded that it would be more constructive for Sunni leaders to tell groups like the Ulama Council to stop making inflammatory remarks.

5. (C) Another Sunni Arab political leader, Shaykh Anwar al-Lahibi from Ninewah, told PolCouns late September 9 that the draft text was "80 percent good," but Sunni Arab politicians would not support it as it stands. Al-Lahibi said the Sunni Arab negotiators had not yet provided a detailed readout to their colleagues in Baghdad. He insisted that the Iraqi identity issue is vital to the Sunni Arab street. Second most important, he stated, was adjusting the federalism language to make less certain the establishment of new regional entities. PolCouns noted that the text in these areas already had been adjusted so that Iraq's Arab League membership is highlighted and the mechanism of determining regional entities is pushed off to next year. Al-Lahibi doubted the changes would be enough to win much Sunni support.

6. (C) Meanwhile, our Baghdad political contacts have received little information on the status of the Irbil meetings between Sunni and Kurdish representatives. Known participants at the talks include ICND members Mahmoud Mashadani and Sheikh Abd al-Nasser al-Janabi, former Sunni Waqf leader Adnan al-Duleimi, IIP Secretary General al-Hashimi, and Saad al-Janabi. There are no reports of

agreed changes resulting from these discussions. In particular, there is no indication of resolution on the wording of Article Three, which states that Iraq is a founding member of the Arab League obliged to follow its statutes.

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